

Executive Summary

Asthma has been recognized as a growing critical public health issue. The United States Department of Health and Human Service's (DHHS) report, "Action Against Asthma," (2000) described asthma as an "epidemic" due to the steady rise in the proportion of people acquiring the disease, and its severity in those who have it. Asthma is responsible for approximately 40,000 hospitalizations and 600 deaths annually in California. There are eight Healthy People 2010 Objectives for asthma, reflecting the importance of this health issue at the federal level (see Appendix A).

The effects of asthma include missed school and work days, disruption of sleep and daily activities, emergent medical visits for asthma exacerbations, and even death. It affects not only persons with asthma, but also family members, friends, schools, and businesses. Statistics reveal that asthma disproportionately adversely affects African Americans and low-income populations. It will be important to target high-risk populations to work toward eliminating these health disparities in the burden of asthma and improve the quality of life of all those who are affected by asthma.

Table I

KEY GOALS:

Research, Epidemiology, and Evaluation Goal Statement

Conduct etiologic, applied, and translation research including descriptive epidemiology, to develop and implement effective asthma prevention and management services.

Public Education Goal Statement

Improve the understanding and management of asthma as both a personal and public health issue for people with asthma and their families, policy makers, and the general public.

Treatment and Management Goal Statement

Optimize the diagnosis, treatment, and management of asthma in California by adherence to the current National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's asthma guidelines.

Secondary Prevention of Asthma

Identify opportunities to reduce exposure to asthma triggers (allergens and irritants) in the home, preschool, school, workplace, and outdoor environment to prevent asthma episodes or reduce their severity.

Policy Goal Statement

Advocate and support policies that promote "asthma friendly" communities, especially those that eliminate the disproportionate burden of asthma for people living in poverty and people of color.

The California Department of Health Services (DHS) sponsored the development of this Strategic Plan (Plan) for Asthma in California to set a direction to address this important public health issue over the next three to five years. Asthma is a complex disease that requires the dedication of a broad range of constituents in order to be addressed comprehensively. The Plan reflects the “Priority Areas” of the “Action Against Asthma” report (DHHS, 2000), the Healthy People 2010 objectives for asthma and the technical assistance program report “Asthma in California: Laying the Foundation for a Statewide Strategy” (Kreutzer, Lipsett, Von Behren, Yamada, 1998). The Plan was developed by a multidisciplinary group of stakeholders throughout California, addressing multiple aspects of this disease and disparities among those affected by this disease.

Important partnerships must be fostered in order to achieve the Plan’s objectives. The success of the Plan depends on collaborations among multiple partners, which include but are not limited to public health professionals, health care providers, community members and organizations, professional organizations, health organizations, ethnic organizations, school organizations, environmental organizations, researchers, local leaders, and people with asthma and their families. In addition, plan implementation will be enhanced with the availability of fiscal resources.

Development and Use of the Plan

Development of the Strategic Plan

In recognition of the growing public health concern about asthma, the California Department of Health Services (DHS), in cooperation with the California Policy Research Center of the University of California, convened a conference in May 1998. The purpose of the conference was to discuss the current state of knowledge about asthma and its implications for research and public policy in the state. The outcome of the conference was a report that outlined a research and policy agenda for asthma, entitled "Asthma in California: Laying the Foundation for a Statewide Strategy."

In the summer of 1999, DHS convened the California Asthma Advisory Committee. The committee recommended the continued development of the statewide strategic plan. The Plan evolved from this coordinated effort and was developed with the input of multiple asthma stakeholders throughout California. The first in-person meeting occurred in October 1999 with a multi-disciplinary work group that laid the framework for the Plan. This work group included stakeholders representing medicine, public health, environmental organizations, community organizations, asthma experts, and persons personally affected by asthma. The work group was divided into four subcommittees: 1) Research, Epidemiology, and Evaluation; 2) Public Education; 3) Treatment and Management; and 4) Policy. In the ensuing months, these four groups continued to develop and refine specific goals, objectives, and strategies for California to address asthma over the next three to five years. The key goals are summarized in Table 1. DHS is indebted to the many persons (listed on pages ii-iv) who have contributed their time and thoughtful input into this Plan.

Using the Strategic Plan

Asthma is a rising, complex, multi-factorial public health issue for which there is no simple, easy, one-time solution. Therefore, there is an immediate need for a comprehensive effort, collaboration of appropriate systems, organizations, and individuals to address asthma in California.

The "Strategic Plan for Asthma in California" is written for use by DHS and all statewide organizations in California, that provide asthma services. Successful implementation of the plan will depend on partnering, collaboration, innovation, and the availability of funding sources. State and local organizations may choose to prioritize the goals and objectives in order to achieve local success. The strategic plan evolved from a critical need to address asthma in both an organized and comprehensive manner.

One can support the need to address the asthma issue by using the "Strategic Plan for Asthma in California" by:

- Allowing leaders and organizations to have a framework to assess the current status of asthma programs and activities in their community/institution and identify areas for improvement or coordination,
- Discussing initiatives with policymakers and other groups to influence asthma policies and funding,
- Committing one's organization to appropriate local strategies,
- Identifying and sharing resources for the control of asthma in California,
- Providing guidance and a framework for new or ongoing asthma activities locally.

By implementing these strategies, California will: (1) increase awareness of asthma and its adverse effects on health; (2) improve quality of life; (3) decrease economic costs; and (4) develop strategies for addressing the rising morbidity and adverse effects due to asthma.

The Plan begins by providing an overview of the issue, a description of the committee, and a summary of the objectives and strategies of the major goals of the strategic plan. The Plan's goals and objectives are not ranked in any order of priority.